

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 07115 270819Z

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
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O 270756Z AUG 76
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1611

S E C R E T BEIRUT 7115

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE
SUBJECT: HOUGHTON/MACK TALKS WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERS

REF: STATE 212205 (NICOSIA 2521)

1. WE VERY MUCH APPRECIATE DEPT SENDING US HOUGHTON/MACK
TELEGRAMS REPORTING ON THEIR VISIT TO JOUNIEH. ALTHOUGH
OPINIONS EXPRESSED BY CHRISTIAN LEADERS CONTAIN FEW SURPRISES,
SINCE THEIR ATTITUDES HAVE NOT CHANGED IN RECENT MONTHS AND
ARE WIDELY REPORTED IN LOCAL MEDIA, HOUGHTON/MACK REPORTS
PROVIDE VALUABLE FIRSTHAND CONFIRMATION OF VIEWS OF KFOUR
FRONT.

2. ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS POSED IN NICOSIA 2521 WILL
OBVIOUSLY REQUIRE BASIC DECISIONS ABOUT U.S. POLICY TOWARDS
LEBANON BOTH DURING PRESENT CONFLICT AND AFTER (IF AND WHEN
A SETTLEMENT IS ACHIEVED), AND TOWARDS OTHER MIDDLE EAST
COUNTRIES. TO EXTENT THAT WE GIVE POSITIVE, SUPPORTIVE
ANSWERS TO THE CHRISTIANS, WE WILL BE MOVING AWAY FROM
NEUTRAL POLICY WE HAVE FOLLOWED SO FAR AND COULD ENCOURAGE
CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP TO HOLD OUT FOR THEIR MAXIMUM DEMANDS,
THUS LENGTHENING THE CONFLICT. NEEDLESS TO SAY ANY
POSITIVE SUPPORT TO CHRISTIANS WILL REDUCE OUR INFLUENCE
IN WEST BEIRUT VERY SUBSTANTIALLY. WHILE THE LEADERS THAT
WE SEE CRITICIZE USG PASSIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD LEBANESE SITUATION
AND SOME FEEL THAT WE ARE SOMEHOW PART OF MASSIVE CHRISTIAN,
SYRIAN AND ISRAELI PLOT, THE MAJORITY DO BELIEVE THAT WE

SECRET

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 07115 270819Z

HAVE A KEY ROLE TO PLAY IN THE FUTURE OF LEBANON.

3. ON QUESTION OF USG DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS IN JOUNIEH, THIS EMBASSY STRONGLY SUPPORTED HOUGHTON/MACK MISSION WHICH HAS BEEN EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL IN REESTABLISHING DIRECT CONTACT WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP WITH MINIMUM NEGATIVE REACTION ON THIS SIDE. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR USG TO ESTABLISH A DIPLOMATIC POST IN JOUNIEH DURING NEXT SIX WEEKS, WHILE ARAB LEAGUE PEACEMAKING EFFORTS ARE IN FULL SWING. PRESUMABLY HOUGHTON/MACK WILL BE RETURNING TO JOUNIEH, AND THIS WILL PROVIDE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGH-LEVEL CONTACT PRIOR TO SARKIS ASSUMPTION OF POWER ON SEPT 23. IF IN EARLY OCTOBER IT IS STILL UNSAFE FOR OFFICERS FROM THIS EMBASSY TO VISIT JOUNIEH, WE COULD TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THIS QUESTION. IF IT IS NECESSARY TO REESTABLISH CONTACT WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AT THAT TIME, WE BELIEVE THE OFFICER SHOULD COME FROM WASHINGTON OR FROM EMBASSY BEIRUT, IN SPITE OF THE TRAVEL PROBLEMS. VISITS TO CHRISTIANLAND BY AN OFFICER FROM EMBASSY DAMASCUS WOULD CARRY POLITICAL OVERTONES THAT WE THINK WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHRISTIANS, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, CAT-B, MEETING REPORTS, POLITICAL LEADERS, MILITARY OCCUPIED AREAS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BEIRUT07115
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 2
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760814/aaaaalqg.tel
Line Count: 82
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: NODIS, EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS, EXDIS
Reference: 76 STATE 212205
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <05 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: LOCK1
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HOUGHTON/MACK TALKS WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006